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MILITARY SURGEONS

By Frederic J. Haskin.

When the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States meets in Washington today, tomorrow and Wednesday for its annual convention, there will be assembled a body of men who, many hold, are responsible for the greatest good that has been accomplished in the present generation.

For, the wise ones say, the future will know the span of years through which the world is now passing as the era of sanitation. In the last decade and a half, the world has learned more of the secrets back of deadly diseases and how to combat them than it had in a thousand years before. Practically all the great discoveries that have meant the undoing of one after another of the diseases that had terrorized the world and taken tolls by the hundreds of thousands, have come about through the work of men assembled in the present convention.

It may therefore not be amiss to enumerate a few of these stupendous accomplishments. The latest and among the biggest of them is the mastery of typhoid, the disease that takes every year the heaviest toll of the peoples of the world of any of those that attack their vitals and suck away their lives.

Armies Devastated.

Typhoid has always been a disease which armies were particularly likely to get, and which ran through them most devastatingly. It has been no uncommon thing for typhoid alone to kill more men than did the enemy. This was true in the Spanish-American war. Diseases in general have always been more deadly to troops than have the attacks of the enemy. The first war in which disease killed fewer men than did fighting was the Russo-Japanese war, which occurred after the dawn of the era of sanitation. In the present war in Europe disease is playing a lesser part than in any conflict in all history and because of the discoveries recently made by military surgeons.

It was in the Spanish-American war, when recruits were dying of typhoid like poisoned ants, that the military surgeons drew the conclusion, and proved it, that the disease was carried by flies. This in itself was vastly valuable, for flies might be kept from contaminated material and might be screened from houses.

But the second step toward a real mastery of the typhoid question did not occur until ten years later. Then the United States heard that military surgeons abroad had developed a vaccine against typhoid. It sent an army surgeon, Major Frederick F. Russell, to Europe to study the work of England and Germany and France along this line. Major Russell found that all these nations had vaccine, but that none of them seemed reliably effective. Out of the methods of all these nations he evolved a vaccine of his own which was effective and which immediately drove typhoid from the American army. Its use was made compulsory over here and the results were so stringently desirable that the product making immune European troops by the million and undoubtedly saved hundreds of thousands of lives each year.

Will Become Rare.

The ultimately greatest benefit of a discovery of this sort is not, of course, in its application to armies but to whole peoples. There is little question but what the time will soon come when whole peoples will be vaccinated against typhoid and the disease will become almost unknown.

The story of the three army surgeons who went to Cuba to solve the riddle of yellow fever is among the most dramatic in medical annals. They had but the theory of the transmission of the disease by the mosquito. Dr. Jesse W. Lazear, in the yellow fever ward of an army field hospital, watched an infected mosquito alight upon his hand, wipe its bill with its front feet and begin the process of making an incision. He let it remain until it had drunk itself full of his blood. It was writing his death warrant, for a few days later he died in most terrible agony.

John R. Klasinger and John J. Moran were healthy young troopers from Ohio. In the face of Dr. Lazear's death they volunteered to submit themselves as subjects for further experiments. They failed to take the disease from being housed with yellow fever patients, even after sleeping in their beds. But both came down when bitten by infected mosquitoes. Both recovered. Each refused the bonus of \$100 offered them by the government. Not much was ever said of their work. But their's was heroism that brought lasting benefits to the whole world.

Big Things Made Possible.

But because of the establishment of the manner of the transmission of yellow fever it was made possible to dig the Panama Canal, to make Cuba habitable, Manila safe as a place to live, to stop the recurrence of plagues at American ports, to bring new possibilities to the tropical countries of all the world, to save hundreds of thousands of lives every year on through all the decade, and centuries of the future.

From the standpoint of the benefit derived by humanity, the discoveries of methods of fighting these two diseases are the most important events of the present generation. Military surgeons are responsible for them.

It fell to the military surgeons of the United States to go into Manila, a plague hole of the East, and make it a demonstration plant of the efficiency of sanitation. There they demonstrated their theory that flies, living on rats, are the bearers of bubonic plague, and freed the city of it by killing the rats—a process that has since been applied to many ports. It was there that they whipped Asiatic cholera, which had been known to kill 30,000 in a single year. It was there that they went forth and vaccinated 7,000,000 people and drove smallpox from the land, a process that was later repeated in Cuba and Porto Rico.

These military surgeons found an-

other problem when they went to Porto Rico. There upon the hillside dwelt a race of people unthinkably poor, shabby, degenerate—a race with only sufficient energy to sit in the sun as death crept upon them. The Spanish, the French, the English, had owned such island, inhabited by such peoples for centuries and had complained of their worthlessness and shiftlessness.

The Hookworm.

Major Bailey K. Ashford was the young American surgeon who was sent into Porto Rico. He had not been there six months when he announced that the Porto Ricans were not suffering from laziness, but from disease. There was among them a malady that was responsible for thirty per cent of the deaths of the island. A thousand of them were dying each month from it. There was within them a parasite, the hookworm, that sapped their vitality and converted them into the miserable creatures they were.

In a little while Major Ashford had developed a cure. When the cause of the disease is known the greater part of the task is usually accomplished. With a dosage of thymol the parasites were banished from their victims. These worms live in the sand and enter the body through the bottoms of bare feet. Methods of keeping them out were devised.

Dr. Charles Waddell Styles, of the Public Health Service, was at the same time working along similar lines among the "poor whites" of the South. There he found the hookworm also. It has since been found the world around and millions of people in the tropics who had previously been thought to be merely lazy and good-for-nothing are being treated, cured of a disease and converted into useful men and women. It is another accomplishment for the permanent good of humanity.

When the present war got well under way in Europe one of the most pathetic calls was from Serbia, where whole people was being attacked by typhus fever. Had the war come five years earlier typhus fever would have been a mystery, and no man would have known the method of its transmission nor how it might be fought.

Secrets Wrested.

But two surgeons of the Public Health Service had gone to Mexico City five years ago and there wrested from the slums of that unfortunate capital the secrets of typhus. They were Dr. J. F. Anderson and Dr. Joseph Goldenberger, the latter of whom came down with the disease, but recovered. They proved that the disease was carried by a body insect, and in no other way.

Typhus fever had been variously known as army fever, prison fever, ship fever and latterly as Brill's disease. It had baffled the scientists through the centuries. But here its riddle solved and so were army surgeons able to stamp it out in Serbia.

These are but the highlights of the accomplishments that have come about in that era of sanitation that has followed the Spanish-American war. Each of the riddles solved has been one that has baffled mankind through the ages and has always taken its toll of human life. Nearly all of them came about, because the Spanish-American war thrust armies into the tropics and with the military surgeon whose business it was to keep those armies healthy.

It is infinitely to the credit of the American army surgeon that he solved in a decade most of the great puzzles that had baffled similar organizations of other nations which had been in the tropics for decades and even centuries.



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